

It's A Trend In Montana And Across The Nation

Indoor smoking was eliminated in all U.S. hospitals over twenty years ago. Recently, an increasing number of medical facilities have adopted tobacco free campus policies to provide further protections from secondhand smoke, promote cessation, and establish tobacco free environments as a community norm.

In Montana...

Over the past several years, a growing number of hospitals and outpatient medical facilities in Montana have created policies that prohibit smoking and/or tobacco use on their property. In a survey of Montana hospitals conducted in the fall of 2007, only three had a tobacco free campus policy in place. By 2015, over sixty-two hospitals and other health-related facilities had created a tobacco free campus. Many other organizations have taken the initial steps to develop a new policy and have been in contact with the Project Coordinator of this program to request assistance in moving forward. Interest has been growing as more and more Montana hospitals, outpatient medical clinics, behavioral health programs, and extended care facilities take this important step and experience positive outcomes.

Montana medical facilities have reported a smooth implementation process with minimal compliance issues when the following key ingredients are present:

- Top management commitment and support
- Thoughtful and inclusive planning process
- Formation of a clear and equitable policy
- Adequate notice and cessation assistance for employees
- Timely and consistent communication messages tailored to all key groups
- Cessation interventions for patients
- Ample and clear signage on property
- Courteous enforcement of policy in a fair and consistent manner
- A focus on the health and safety of patients, employees, and visitors.

Across the Nation...

There is momentum across the United States for hospitals and medical facilities to take a leadership role on this major public health issue by establishing tobacco free campus policies. Many states have initiated a similar project either through their state department of health, state hospital association, or university system. These efforts have been met with success.

QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Won't this policy be hard to manage?

Compliance will be high if people who enter your campus are aware of the policy. A well-designed policy that contains clearly written provisions, a broad communication plan, and adequate signage on your property will largely be self-enforcing. Remember, an overwhelming majority of patients, employees, and community members don't use tobacco.

Will community members be supportive of this policy?

People expect hospitals and medical facilities to promote health-enhancing behaviors. Tobacco harms nearly every organ of the body and kills over 480,000 Americans every year. Community members will appreciate that your organization is taking a leadership role in this major public health issue.

I'm afraid that employees will quit their jobs or just not comply.

If employees understand the provisions of the policy including the consequences for non-compliance, problems can be averted. By giving them ample notice of the policy start date, those who use tobacco will have the opportunity to make the personal adjustments necessary to be in compliance. When a campus-wide policy includes cessation assistance, the support by employees will be high. Treating this policy in a similar manner as other personnel policies will help employees realize that compliance is expected. When it is enforced in a fair and consistent manner from day one, very few employees if any will disobey the policy.

Won't this be expensive to implement?

The benefits of this policy will outweigh any costs incurred from cessation assistance, signage, and other implementation materials. Because it will motivate some employees to quit tobacco, your workforce will be healthier and more productive, while your health care, insurance, and maintenance costs are likely to decrease. The Montana Tobacco Quit Line can be a source of cessation guidance and free or reduced cost medications for those who want to work on quitting.

You can't force people to quit smoking or chewing tobacco.

That is true. This policy does not mandate that employees, patients, and visitors quit smoking or chewing tobacco products, it simply prohibits their use on your property. A tobacco free campus will provide additional incentive for people to work on quitting, and cessation assistance from your organization can enhance their success.